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## Lamorinda Rowers Help Propel Oakland Strokes at Nationals

By Karl Buscheck



Oakland Strokes Women's Varsity 4+ Boat wins a Gold Medal by Open Water at the 2017 U.S. Rowing Nationals on June 11 at Mercer Lake, West Windsor, NJ. Photo provided

There was a common thread among the three Oakland Strokes boats that medaled at the US Rowing Youth National Championships. All of them were powered – at least in part – by Lamorinda rowers.

“There have always been Lamorinda kids at the heart of our varsity boats,” said Strokes managing director Dana Hooper, who rowed for the East Bay powerhouse as a Miramonte student in the 1990s. “We always get good kids from that area. I don’t know why it is, but there always seems to be really good athletes coming from that area.”

The Women’s Varsity Four team was one of two Strokes boats that claimed a gold at the national championships held in West Windsor, NJ on June 11 and June 12.

The boat, which smashed the competition on its way to the top of the podium, featured four local athletes in Jill Lundstrum, Caroline Ricksen and Riley Eversole of Miramonte and Limor Dubrovsky of Acalanes.

“It was just an incredibly aggressive, courageous race that they went after,” said Hooper. “And (they) just kind of decimated the field from early on.”

What made the decisive victory even more impressive was that the women’s team had finished more than a boat length behind the River City Rowing Club – the boat that raced in second at nationals – just a month-and-a-half earlier.

“They just trained their hearts out and got themselves a boat length up, which in rowing terms, as soon as you can get a boat length up you feel really good about yourself,” explained Hooper.

The Men’s Varsity Eight, which included Brendan Purtill and Nikita Lilichenko of Miramonte and Cole Ortiz of Campolindo, was the Strokes other gold medal winning boat.

“We’re pretty proud of it. For the men’s

side, it’s definitely the premier event. So, it’s one that you want to win,” said men’s varsity head coach Brian de Regt after his top team secured its second consecutive national title and capped an undefeated spring season.

“To go up against everyone in our region and everyone in our country and not lose in the spring I think is pretty great,” de Regt said. “We’re very, very proud of the guys.”

The coach was equally proud of the Men’s Lightweight Eight boat, which shattered its preseason expectations by earning a silver medal.

“There’s a lot of pressure trying to repeat a championship,” de Regt said of his varsity squad. “So, it’s a relief to do it. Where with the lightweights, who didn’t even make it to the national championship last year, [earning a medal] is almost a bonus.”

The Lightweights had a pair of Lamorinda rowers in Drew Barber and Calvin McDonald of Miramonte.

“Medaling was not something that we expected to happen at the beginning of the year,” admitted de Regt. “To see them come down in a medal position behind a really incredible boat from Miami’s Belen Jesuit Prep School, it was surprising and thrilling and a lot of fun to see.”

From the back-to-back golds for the Varsity boat to the surprise silver for the Lightweights, 2016 ended up being a banner season for the men’s Strokes program.

“It’s the best spring that the Oakland Strokes men have ever had,” de Regt said. “So, we’re extremely pleased with the way the guys have been performing, the way they’ve bought into the program and how hard they’re working. It’s very satisfying as a coach to see their hard work get the end results and see them get what they deserve.”

## Orinda Intermediate School Golf Team Earns Back-to-Back Titles

By Karl Buscheck



The championship OIS golf team. Photo provided

A stroke of good fortune played a big part in the rise of the Orinda Intermediate School golf team.

“We’re so lucky to have Eric Jones,” team manager Denice Gant said of the former Stanford golfer who is one of the squad’s co-head coaches along with Tanya Chantara. “That was just a gift that fell in our lap.”

As Gant tells it, Jones had emailed her before the season start asking if she wanted any help running the team. After taking one look at Jones’ resume, the answer was a resounding “Yes.” Jones is not just an OIS parent, but also a two-time World Long Drive Champion and Northern California PGA Teacher of the Year.

“He is the reason we were able to take this (program) from 20 (players) to 36,” Gant said of Jones’ impact in his first season with the team. “We could not have done it without him.”

When Gant initially took over as team manager two seasons ago, the OIS team consisted of 12 athletes. This season, there were 36 players on the roster – including 23 boys and 13 girls.

In each of the past two seasons, OIS has rolled through the East Bay Middle School Golf League schedule with an unblemished record in match-play. The Bulldogs have also won the league’s championship match in back-to-back seasons, besting Stanley at Buchanan Field Golf Course in Concord on both occasions.

With such a sprawling roster, there are plenty of logistical challenges to navigate for Gant, Jones, Chantara and the team’s crew of volunteer coaches.

“We never have all 36 players together because we would crush a facility if we sent 36 players (to the same place),” Gant explained.

Instead, the program is split in two.

There’s the competitive team, which consists of the top six golfers, and the development squad which includes the rest of the players.

The Bulldogs practice at Buchanan Fields on Mondays and at Moraga Country Club on Tuesdays. On Wednesdays, the team plays its match of the week. The home matches take place at Buchanan Fields, while the away matches are hosted at a variety of courses across the East Bay, from Boundary Oaks to Diablo Hills to Tilden Park to Redwood Canyon and Lake Chabot.

“It’s basically golf immersion for 10 weeks,” Gant said. “They’re playing three days a week. So, they’re playing 30 times in 10 weeks. It’s pretty amazing. You see this transformation from these kids from the beginning to when they’re done. So, it’s really awesome.”

The burgeoning team has also played its way onto a few of the premier courses in the area.

“We do have a number of kids who are members at private clubs,” Gant said. “And their clubs have opened their doors to us. We had invitations and we played invitationals at Orinda Country Club, Claremont Country Club and Moraga Country Club. The support of the local country clubs has been incredible for our team.”

Next spring’s group will look noticeably different from the current championship team. According to Gant’s calculations, 18 players will be graduating from the program – many of whom will go on to play at Miramonte.

Even with the turnover looming, Gant is already planning for yet another successful go-around in 2017.

“We’re going to continue to support as many golfers as we can,” Gant said. “And keep the program as open and inclusive as we can.”

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